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Prosperity and parenthood: a study of family planning among the Victorian middle classes.

Author: Banks JA

Source: London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1954. 240 p.

Abstract: This monograph presents a study which attempts to identify the causal factors that resulted in the rapid decline of fertility in England since the Victorian period (late 19th century). The author looks at social history, rather than demographic factors in isolation, to illuminate the subject. Focus is on family life and characteristics of the 1870s, and Anthony Trollope is used as a case study of a person unaware of the rapid social change fomenting in the wings of Victorian England, with people like John Stuart Mill and Darwin in the forefront of ideas. The book takes each of the following topics in turn and paints a picture of social stature and practice which largely became obsolete at the century's turn: 1) decline in fertility; 2) the Population Controversy of the late 19th century; 3) the notion of "proper time to marry"; 4) the pattern of expenditure in a Victorian middle class (i.e., professional) household; 5) domestic assistance in England; 6) the paraphernalia of gentility; 7) incomes; 8) the advent of birth control and the control of family size; 9) the cost of children; and 10) the standard of living and fertility decline. In general the decline in fertility resulted directly from attempts by families to limit family size for pecuniary reasons. Yet, amazingly, Malthusian argument (see Population Controversy) was not applied to the poorer classes as a means of eradicating poverty, and among the societies as a whole (i.e., not just the middle class) it took 40 years for the birth rate to

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